

DEC 27 1985

STATINTL

The Washington Merry-Go-Round

A Schoolmate Writes to Brezhnev

By Jack Anderson

A Milwaukee auto supply dealer, who sat for seven years in the same schoolroom with the man who is now ruler of all the Russians, has written a series of personal letters to his former classmate, appealing to him to stop antisemitism in the Soviet Union.



Anderson

Nathaniel (Nat) Kruglak, a cheerful Jewish refugee who made good as an American capitalist, and Leonid Brezhnev, the darkly scowling czar of the Kremlin, studied and starved together during the Bolshevik revolution and the famine that followed.

Kruglak has told his story to the State Department, which has verified the basic details.

Unlike some of their classmates who caught the spirit of the revolution and made cause with the Communists, both Brezhnev and Kruglak kept their mouths shut in those days and concentrated on their studies.

It wasn't until after graduation—and another year together taking a vocational course at a nearby steel mill—that Kruglak fled with his parents to America and Brezhnev belatedly joined the Communist Party.

Kruglak recalls that Brezhnev as a boy was usually aloof and alone—quiet, introspective, inclined to be "sneaky." He was the only millhand's son in the class, and his parents must have made tremendous sacrifices to pay his high tuition.

Even more than the others, Brezhnev suffered from the hunger and disease that accompanied the revolution. Kruglak recalls that young Brezhnev came back to class after a typhus seizure looking like a skeleton.

Shoeless Scholars

Times became so hard that parents arranged to pay the school fees in potatoes, cabbage and hand-me-down clothing. Teachers and pupils alike could not afford to wear shoes to school.

In nine separate letters to the Kremlin leader, Kruglak has reminded him of the bleak, threadbare days they shared together. Their school was called the Classical Gymnasium of Kamenskoye, a dreary, 2-story gray brick building in the Ukrainian factory town of Kamenskoye, which the communists have renamed Dneprodzerzhinsk.

To jog Brezhnev's memory, Kruglak in his first letter named their teachers and the first five names on the class roll. The roll call began: "Aimov, Arbezbaev, Artemov, Barabash, Brezhnev . . ."

Kruglak also wrote of Inspector Zolotaryev, who enforced discipline in the school. He would punish a pupil for the least infraction, such as a missing button or dirty uniform, by twisting an arm behind his back, shaking him roughly and shoving him toward a large pendulum clock in the hall. "Under the clock!" he would bellow. Then he would force the boy to stand stiffly against the wall under the clock for one to three hours.

Jewish Boys Suffered

He was always more cruel with the Jewish boys, and in one letter, Kruglak reminded Brezhnev: "Zolotaryev used to ask a student committing some infraction of the rules, 'Art thou a Hebrew?' I'll never forget how once he almost tore off my left arm."

"In 1918-19, Zolotaryev escaped . . . If anti-Semitism is again in existence in the U.S.S.R., then it is due to the influence of the sons and grandchildren of men like Zolotaryev . . ."

"Even the Pope of Rome and his prelates are trying to eliminate anti-Semitism in their conduct and prayers," Kruglak pleaded. "To allow its existence in the U.S.S.R. is illogical. It can lead only to a loss of many friends."

Another time, Kruglak sent

his famous classmate some press clippings as evidence that Soviet anti-Semitism was paying off in bad publicity.

But Kruglak's letters either didn't get through to Brezhnev, or the Soviet leader didn't deign to reply. Kruglak made one last try.

"Public opinion here and in Europe," he wrote, "is condemning your administration for persecuting three million Jews in the U.S.S.R."

There was still no word from Brezhnev.

Though they sat only three desks apart for seven years, the two former schoolmates clearly are now a world apart.

News Briefs

Jack Valenti, LBJ's special assistant and husband of LBJ's beautiful former secretary, has put the State Department on the spot by his request to be Ambassador to Italy. Hitherto the State Department has not named Americans of Italian descent for the Rome post . . . Dr. Richard M. Pollis, who disappeared mysteriously in the Netherlands, apparently drowned in a canal, was definitely a CIA agent. . . . An American monorail company, Goodell of Houston, will build a \$70-million monorail system to link up Mexico City for the Olympic Games.

© 1965, Bell-McClure Syndicate, Inc.